

United States Institute of Peace
Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
Sudan Experience Project

Interview # 88 –Executive Summary

Interviewed by: W. Haven North
Initial interview date: June 11, 2007
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The interviewee is from the Equatorial Region of Southern Sudan, but grew up in the North and has been living for many years in Switzerland working with a faith based organization.

Asked about the root causes of the conflict between the North and the South, the interviewee focused on the ethnic differences between the African Southerners and the Arab Northerners. At the same time, there were problems within the South between the dominant Dinka and people from Equatoria. “We prefer the Dinka, to be with them, let us solve our problems, but we do not want to be suppressed, whether by Islamic law or Arabization.” The idea of a unified country could work, but the problem is Arabization, racism, and exploiting the resources of the South to develop the North, where the Arab Sudanese live.

The North and South agreed to negotiate because they were both tired of war: The North was being attacked “from all corners”: South, Darfur, and the East. The North wanted to make unity attractive to the South, but the North is not implementing the CPA and not capable of implementing it. The North is looking for another way to destabilize the South; a *coup d'état* is unlikely, as the South will automatically separate. They want to induce Southern politicians make a mistake by giving money to those ministers who are now accused of being corrupt.

The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) did not spell out what system should be in place to approve the national budget, how funds from the oil revenues are to be divided and managed. John Garang’s policy was to fight for the marginalized communities: Darfur and Kassala. But the CPA when signed did not include these groups. It did include people from the Nuba Mountains. The Darfur people did not want to have their own system but do not have the idea of splitting from the North.

The elections have been postponed because people are not prepared with identity cards, etc. The people of the South are looking forward to the referendum. The Southerners strongly believe that if there is a division into two countries, then the North and South can have good relationships. On building up the Government of the South, Southerners outside the country will “come back.” But the conditions are horrible: no electricity, no clean water, no schools, houses occupied by others. Southerners in the North would like to go back to the South, especially those in displaced persons camps.

The churches are trying to help the Southern Government attract people to go back. With respect to the international community, some of the European countries have always been interested. But the Southern Peoples Liberation Army (SPLA) people who come to Europe, do not meet with the Southerners in Europe, who can help them with ideas. The UN is not doing anything. It has a peacekeeping force in the South, but it should insist that the Government of the North allow the total number of peacekeepers agreed to.

It is important that the international community understand the complexity of the North and South. There should be a good system for monitoring the referendum vote; if done properly, it will come out according to the wishes of the South; so the international community has a very important role.

As for lessons learned, the CPA should have been shared with the people so that they can see the loopholes, things that are not clear, what it would be like if the two governments separated or if they are not separated.

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Q: What is your association with Sudan and with the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) and your experience with Sudan?

A: I am a Sudanese from the South, from the Equatoria Region. I came out of the country in 1992 and have been living now in Switzerland for twelve and a half years. We follow the news of South Sudan from here.

Q: And do you have any particular projects related to Sudan?

A: I am working the African desk in a faith base organization, and we have many meetings with church leaders in Nairobi, in Khartoum.

Q: Specifically related to Sudan and the peace agreement...?

A: They discuss what is happening, of course, about the people, whether they are interested in going back home from Uganda, in Khartoum to go back to the South. Though people may have interest, like those in East Africa, Uganda and Kenya, they worry about their children and schooling. And then also shelter is a problem, because many of them lost their houses. Their houses are occupied by those who remained in the country during the war.

So those are the difficult things. For those in Khartoum, I learned that some of them went to Juba or to the South and when they saw that the situation was not yet settled they went back to Khartoum.

Q: What is your understanding of the root causes of the conflict between the North and the South, and within Sudan generally?

A: I grew up in the North from the age of three. My father was a military person in the Sudan Army. President Omar Bashir was his student in the military college.

I was born in El Geneina in Darfur [capital of Western Darfur], but my birth certificate says that I was born in Juba. Why was this? My birth certificate was produced in December and I was born in January, almost one year earlier. That was because, I believe, my father, being a supporter of the Southern Front, believed that the South might

one day be a separate country, I guess that was one of the reasons. And we people in the North who grew up in the North, my father, being in the military, he had a good relationship with his colleagues, but still deep in our hearts I strongly believed that I am from the South. We had that strong feeling that probably one day the South would be a separate country.

So we from the North who lived in the North, our point of view towards the people from the North, though we are friendly in a way, even so, we still we feel that we are different. Because as a Northerner, they know how to differentiate members of the different southern tribes because of appearance and people like us from Equatoria, they will ask you, "Are you from Africa?" meaning maybe from Uganda or Kenya or something like that. But they will just ask, "Are you from Africa?" And we always say, "What about you? We are in Africa." So we know that there are differences. When I refer to "they" I am talking about the North, the Arabs, the Northern people; when you come to the South, you talk about "our Southerners."

We enjoyed the peace agreement in 1972, which was a good one, but then came our differences. During the time Abel Alier was the president of the South, the Dinka believed that they were dominant, since the president was from the Dinka tribe. Their behavior towards the Equatorians in Juba was very negative. Still we people from the North, who grew up in the North, felt these are like family differences which can be resolved if we sit down together. But the people who were in the South, being away from the Northern Sudanese did not really have a clue about them. So when they were frustrated by the Dinkas' attitudes, they strongly stood for the division of the South.

When the South was divided in 1983, the people who were from Equatoria, and those who were refugees in Uganda and were returnees, had no clue about the Northern Sudanese, compared to the Dinka. The people who lived in Khartoum know the difference, but we say, "We prefer the Dinka, to be with them, let us solve our problems, but we do not want to be suppressed, whether by Islamic law or Arabization."

That is the whole history between North and South and I am one of those. The CPA (when you look into the whole Comprehensive Peace Agreement) did not spell out seriously what system should be put in order to approve the national budget; things like that were not spelled out clearly. They did not make things clear: neither how funds generated from the oil fields are to be used between the South and the North, nor how to divide them. Though they say fifty-fifty, the system, the management, was not clear.

Q: What is your understanding of why the North and South agreed to negotiate and have a CPA? What brought them together? What were the forces that influenced them to negotiate?

A: I believe that probably they were both tired of this war. As for the Southern part, after Mengistu was out and the offices of the SPLA were moved to Equatoria, the people of Equatoria, even among those there were some differences in the movement, some of them suffered a lot in the SPLA movement. But still because they believed that our

enemy is the Northern Sudanese. So let us forget our differences, let us just continue and go ahead. I believe the people are tired of the war and even the North, how many children died because of this war and Darfur was hitting them seriously.

I guess Khartoum, if they continued with the war in the South as well as being attacked from the North, as well as from the East, who also were preparing themselves, the North would find themselves being defeated from all corners. So I believe strongly they thought: "Let us at least come to an agreement."

You have read many of the CPA protocols, which have been signed. I believe they wanted to try something like this. The North, according to what they say, wanted to make unity attractive to the South, but, unfortunately, when it comes to real implementation they are not doing it; they are not capable of doing it. Instead they are looking for another way to destabilize the South so that no mistake will be found from them, because, number one, they will not think of pulling off a *coup d'état*, because any *coup d'état* will mean probably the separation of the South automatically. How it will be we do not know, but it will mean the South and North will separate. It will take another fifty years; it will be war throughout. They will never think of a *coup d'état*.

Now their policy is to destabilize the South. Instead of making unity attractive, they want to make our Southern politicians make a mistake, by giving money not in a very clear way. Money goes into the hands of those ministers who are now being accused of being corrupt in the South, because there is no clear system of how the money is given and how the money is to be distributed.

Q: Money from the North?

A: That comes from the government of the North to the South. Salva Kiir was ashamed when he himself said that the CPA is not being implemented, there is no money, nothing, it is not going ahead, but then Omar Bashir said, "We have given you money. What have you done with the money?" This means that the North actually is seeking to destabilize the South.

Q: What were the main forces that were able to bring about agreement on all these protocols? Do you have any sense of that?

A: Given the differences inside the SPLA now that they are tired of the war, at least some of the members of the SPLA were willing to accept the principle of a referendum. It may not be ideal to go alone, but they pushed for the referendum.

Q: One of the comments about the CPA was that it was a negotiation just between the North and the South and that there were a lot of other groups that were not included in the negotiations, in the South and in the North, the Darfuris and so on. Do you have any view about whether they should have been included in the CPA negotiations or not?

A: It was John Garang's policy at the beginning, when he was fighting for the marginalized communities; that is why people from Darfur joined, the Nuba Mountains and people from Kassala. But then, when it came to signing this peace agreement, it ended up being between the SPLA, which is actually supposed to include the Nubas and the East and so on

Q: But it did not?

A: It did not; the people from the South, who took up arms together with John Garang, some of them were Anyanya, and the objective of the Anyanya was to separate the North from the South. The problem was the policy of John Garang; he wanted to win the Arab world, some of them, to support him. Khadafi supported him for at least two years. Those from Darfur and the Nuba Mountains, of course, felt they had been betrayed. But then at least the CPA included the people of Nuba, because the people of Nuba really stood for the movement, but the people of Darfur wanted to have their own system. The people of Darfur do not have the idea of splitting from the North. They may be fighting for their rights but not with the idea of being a separate country.

The South, on the other hand, has something else in mind, even though they say, "We are fighting for the marginalized but our aim at the end is to separate the North from the South." This is the problem.

So the Nubas have benefited from the CPA, because they are included. Not in the referendum, but at least they have a stake for themselves. John Garang, I understand, was going to give two per cent of the oil wealth to the Nuba Mountains, two to Darfur, two to Kassala, from the southern share.

Q: Is that happening? Is anything being done about that?

A: I do not know. That was put in the agreement, but the implementation, we do not know how far...

Q: There was a power sharing protocol. Are you familiar with that? There are many components to this agreement. Do you have any views on any of the pieces of it? What is happening with some of these different protocols? You mentioned wealth sharing but then there was power sharing and there are monitoring arrangements.

A: With the United Nations?

Q: Right.

A: I understood there are soldiers from the UN around the Malakal area and maybe a few in Juba, but the number is not that large. I do not think they really followed what was agreed in the papers.

Q: Another CPA provision is to have a census. Do you know whether a census is being taken countrywide?

A: I have not followed that.

Q: And then there are elections to come. Do you know if there are preparations for elections?

A: I understood that they were postponed because people are not prepared for that, because they need to gather the data, the number of people, identity cards, things like that.

Q: Was it postponed until a particular time?

A: I was in Nairobi last October; they said the elections should not take place so soon, because they have to prepare.

Q: And then there is supposed to be the referendum in 2011. How do you think that will go?

A: When you talk with people from the South, they say they do not know if it will happen because of what is happening with the rebels who are trying to destabilize the people from Ekuatoria. They believe that people, like militias, are being bought by the Government of Northern Sudan to attack the Southern people. People are afraid of the modalities of the referendum, though they are eager to have the referendum in 2011.

Q: What people are you referring to?

A: The people of the South. They are looking forward to it. But the people from the North say: "if the South separates, there will be more problems because of their tribal differences." That is what Arab Sudanese would say.

A Southern Sudanese who is for the separation of the South from the North would say: "Our problems increased because of the North. If we are left alone, as one body, we will know how to solve our differences, because nobody will be receiving money from the North to destabilize us. We will be dealing with our problems by ourselves."

Q: Some commentators suggest that if the South attempts to go independent, the war might start up again. Do you think that is possible?

A: The fear is always in Sudan, for example, with Nimeiry, there was a *coup d'état*. So we from the South, we thought that when the North thinks that things are going for the referendum, then a *coup d'état* will happen, somebody will come up and say that this agreement was between two parties, it does not represent the whole country and probably a *coup d'état* will take over, so that the referendum will not take place. That is the fear of some of us from the South. But when we talk like this from the South, we say that if the

North tries a *coup d'état*, the South will automatically split. But how automatically it will split, that is the question.

Q: To what extent do you think the South is preparing itself to be self-governing, if it becomes independent?

A: We had self-government before, in 1972; we enjoyed the Addis Ababa agreement for ten years. We strongly believe that if there is division between the two countries, then we can develop a very good relationship between North and South. This would permit a Southerner who wants to stay in Khartoum to stay as long as he wants, but as a foreigner. A Northerner can stay in the South, free to do business, as the Arab business people always have done, to run businesses and they are welcome. That is the best way.

Q: What is being done to build up the governmental capacity of the South?

A: The government in the South nowadays is being led by people who have been in war for most of the time. Somebody like Salva Kiir, unfortunately, was not close enough to Garang to know all of Garang's secrets or to know everything. He was just put in and now things are not working as they should. But probably when the South is really divided from the North, that is when people who are outside Sudan will come in, everybody will be encouraged to sit down and see how to exploit the resources in the South, to make use of these resources.

Q: You mentioned that there are people going back to the South, is that right?

A: There are people who have gone back, but then they are doing voluntary work. They go and work for a while and go back to Europe, because the situation is horrible. Electricity is not there as it should be; only a few places have electricity. No clean water. So it is difficult and you can imagine, somebody who is living in Europe, leaving his family in Europe and has to go and work in the South. The salary he earns in the South cannot support his family abroad. But they would love to go back if the government were to be put in place.

Q: But they need people to go back to set up the government as well, don't they? A lot of the talent is outside the country.

A: Yes. Many people, if they have houses, they find their houses have been taken. Then you are not supposed to chase somebody out of your house. I was told the government told people, please, you came back and if you find that your house has been occupied, please be patient. Do not chase people out because where will they go? So you better stay where you are until you see how things are moving. It is unfortunate that things are not moving because of corruption. I have learned that the Minister of Finance is being put in prison.

Q: You lived in the North for quite a while. What was the view of the Northern people about the Northern government?

A: Many of them really hated the government, but it is so difficult to get rid of it. So they are really frustrated. If they have the chance to be refugees somewhere else, they just move out. Otherwise, you join their government and become exactly like them. Even I understand the soldiers and the police, the way they behave now is really very negative.

Q: What is the condition of Southerners still in the North, in Khartoum? I have heard a lot of them are trying to go back South? Is that right?

A: Many would like to go back to the South but the problem is, as I said, if they come, where can they stay? Some of them can share a house with uncles, cousins and so on, a very big number of people together. But then there are the problems of water and toilets and so on. In Khartoum, the situation was better for them; they are living in good houses. But those who are living in the displaced people's camps, they are the ones who really seriously want to go back, because they live in camps and the camps are in very poor condition. I know those camps, because I was working with Oxfam and when I used to visit the displaced people's camps, of course, after getting permission from the security services; the situation is horrible. No employment, they have no right to go to town.

Maybe it has changed now, but during my time when I was still in Khartoum the displaced people had no right to go from the camps to the town. Many of the young girls go to the town to do cleaning jobs to bring money for their relatives. So with all this frustration, that is why they prefer to go back to the South.

Q: You are working for a non-governmental organization. What are the non-governmental organizations doing to try to bring peace and to ease some of these crises that are happening in the North and the South and in Darfur? What is your sense of what non-governmental organizations are doing?

A: They are trying their best. For example, for relief into Darfur, the problem is governmental permission to go into those areas and then there are checkpoints. The problem is the government is trying to make things difficult. When I was working at Oxfam in 1992, before I left, my boss was asked to leave the country within 24 hours because he was suspected...

Q: So the NGOs are trying to bring peace agreements or the implementation of the CPA, apart from just the humanitarian work?

A: Norwegian Church Aid is trying to help the churches, because some of the churches have access to the people in the government, like in the South. They have to arrange how the people should be received if ever they would like to go back and try to help the government to work hard to attract the people to come back to the South; they cannot go back if there is nothing. So we have other organizations, which are related to the churches, who do it in that way.

Q: What is your understanding of the role of the international community, the governments and the UN, what do you think that they are able to do or are doing to bring about peace and the implementation of the CPA?

A: I look at the European Union, in general, you can just select some countries who have always been interested. For example, Norway, though not an EU member, of course has always been there. It is a pity that some of our people from the SPLA, when they come to Europe, they even do not have an idea about meeting with the Southerners who are already in Europe. This is another problem. They just come and we hear that they came, they left, they came and they left. If they meet with the Southerners who are in Europe, the Southerners can help them with ideas. When they come to a country, they meet the government, talk to them about development, about the roads, about hospitals, building hospitals. We could talk with them about this, but they just come and go. You just hear that they came and they left. The European Union is not interested in the division of the South from the North.

Q: What about the role of the UN?

A: The UN is not doing anything. The protocols are there. The only thing the UN does is the peacekeeping force that is now present in the South. But if they were serious they should have insisted that the Sudanese government allow the number of UN peacekeepers, the total number they have agreed on, to be really employed there, deployed in the South. But the government of Sudan of course does not agree with everything. Now, on the Darfur problem also, you see that the Sudanese government has more power than the European Union or the UN.

Q: How do you see the Darfur being resolved, if at all?

A: Only the international community: if really they lay down tough conditions to the Sudan government, it will be done. But as they say, the Sudan government is not allowing, is not permitting... The Sudan government knows very well that nobody will enter Sudan, like Iraq, because nobody has an interest in doing that. So they keep on just making life very difficult for everybody, not giving them the okay to come and bring about progress in stopping the war. There is nobody from the Darfur side to protect the people. The Jinjaweed have better resources; they do not have resources like the SPLA, to bring down planes. They are just killing innocent people who have no guns.

So for me the international community has to draw a line, to give a deadline to Sudan that by this date we want to hear from you, if we do not hear, we are going to bring a UN force to come and get rid of the Jinjaweed. If the Sudanese government is threatened like that with a deadline, I am sure it would work.

Q: I understand there are groups in the East, like the Beja, who also have difficulties with the government. Is that true?

A: They had one of their important leaders killed by Omar Bashir shortly after the coup that brought him to power. It angered them. They were not happy about it because it was a man who was for the development of the Eastern Region. He was assumed to be implicated in plotting an abortive *coup d'état* against Omar Bashir.

And since there is no development in the Eastern Region, the people are not happy. All the development is in Khartoum. And so when they saw the movement of the SPLA, especially when the SPLA had offices in eastern Ethiopia, it encouraged them to fight. But it seems now it has cooled down, but the movement from the Eastern Region is still there.

Q: Is anybody, internationally or within Sudan, presenting a vision of a united country?

A: It has been like that before, until now, it has always been one united Sudan. It could work, but the problem is this idea of Arabization, racism, plays a big role in the heads of the government. The idea is exploit the resources from the South to develop the North. And when you talk of developing the North, it is not developing every part, such as Darfur and the East and the Nuba Mountains. The idea is just to develop Khartoum, Gezira and northward, where the so-called Arab Sudanese live. That is the problem.

But if the government of Sudan wanted to have a united state, developing all of the country equally, I am quite sure, the South especially would have never, ever taken up arms to fight. What for? But the system of Arabization, Islamization is worse than exploiting resources from the South.

Q: But there is no one in Sudan or outside who is promoting the idea of one country united?

A: John Garang brought it up.

Q: That is right.

A: He was saying that he was fighting for the marginalized. The government of the North, they do not want to change. They always manipulate; they do not want to say anything positive. This is the problem. Even the universities, they changed the universities. Before, people in the public schools studied Arabic as a subject, but when they went to the university all the classes were in English. They changed everything. Even the University of Juba, which is in the South, now is almost Arabized. And English is the official language in the South, so why Arabize the schools? So they have an agenda.

Q: Is there any topic that you feel is very important that we have not touched on?

A: The referendum: will only Sudanese resident in the country be able to participate, excluding the Southern Sudanese who are outside Sudan? That is something which is not clear. It seems we are going to be left out.

The General Secretary of the Sudan Council of Churches came here, the interim general secretary. I advised him, "Better to have the people who are within the country have identity cards, because I am afraid that if they do not have identity cards in the future it will be said 'If you do not have an identity card, you are not going to vote.'"

Q: You are including those who are outside the country as well.

A: We are doubtful. Maybe the North will say no, because they know very well the people who are outside are all for the separation of the country.

Q: Is there anybody working on identity cards?

A: I have no clue, but the husband of my sister is the Minister of Humanitarian Affairs in Khartoum; before he came to Geneva, I told him they should think ahead about such things.

Q: Is there anything we have not touched on that you feel is important or would like to emphasize?

A: It is necessary that the international community understand the complexity of the North and South. In some of the meetings, when I meet with people in Geneva, they say, "Do you think it is a good idea to separate? Do you not think you should resolve your differences?"

But for me, build a good relationship between the North and the South and let us be two separate countries with freedom of movement, people can move from the North to the South and from the South to the North but their national identity will be known. Some of the Southerners would prefer to be in the North, because they were born there, they do not want to move. For me, if the international community is encouraged to see the difference between the two, probably it will help.

Q: And how do you think that could be achieved?

A: To tell them that when it comes to the referendum, there must be a good system to monitor the voting. I strongly believe that if the voting is monitored properly, the result will come out according to the wishes of the South. So they should play a very important role in that.

Q: As you look back over your experience, particularly in relation to the CPA, (we are looking for lessons to be learned from this experience to date), what stands out in your mind as the important lessons of what should have been done or should not have been done in trying to bring about peace and development?

A: I would say that when they signed this peace agreement (CPA), I wish it had been shared before, so that people could see some of the loopholes, things which are not clear. People would have said, "Let this be clarified."

For example, now even though we talk about the referendum, they never tried to say, if the government is going to be separated, it will look like this; if Sudan is going to be united, it looks like this. If those are put clearly to people and then let people vote for their preference; it would be very helpful.

Q: How much understanding do you think people in the South and in the North have of the CPA and what it includes?

A: Not many; when I used to go to Nairobi for our meetings, I told the church leaders that if they have access to photocopies of the agreement, let them distribute them in their meetings, even in the churches. When the time approaches, let them speak about important points and explain them to the people. They should prepare the people early enough, not wait until the last minute.

Q: These are church leaders from Sudan?

A: From Sudan. People are grouping themselves according to tribes. Politics are mostly discussed on the internet. So people are briefing themselves and building awareness, but it is not that deeply known by everybody.

Q: When you meet with these church groups, (you say you are meeting with them in Nairobi), what do they think needs to be done? What steps need to be taken? What do they talk about?

A: We have a lot of problems, not only politics. Most of the time, of course, they talk about people not being happy, that the CPA is not being implemented, that is one thing, which they talk about seriously; how to bring people back, what arrangements, how to welcome people back to the South, to really encourage them to come back. These are things that they talk about.

Q: Are there other things they worry about or stress when you meet with these groups?

A: Of course, the other worry was that there were two councils: for the South, it has been run from the Nairobi office, and for the North, it was in Khartoum, but now they have succeeded in merging the two councils. There is now one Sudan Council of Churches, which is based in Khartoum. They are still working on the one council; probably they will have a branch in Juba.

Q: What are they mainly trying to work towards?

A: They used to run programs for one to two years.

Q: What kind of programs?

A: Programs like relief programs for the displaced camps in Khartoum, as well as a health program, humanitarian programs. But because they have had difficulties financially, they are almost closed down, I mean the council. Now they are just running the council with a few staff, trying to cover the liabilities; all staff has been terminated from their jobs. They are working on settling the council by bringing the two councils together, which are now merged. They will start to bring staff in and then probably start running their programs again.

Q: Are there other things that stand out in your mind as things that should be done or should not have been done? You have covered a lot and have been very informative, very helpful.

A: The churches also are trying their best to build their unity, so that they walk together with the people. We have so many of our displaced who changed their names, they became Muslims just because they needed food, they needed clothing for their children, they wanted their children to go to school and the Islamic Dawa used to help. So maybe the work of the churches will be in the future, when the people come back, how to bring them back to Christianity and we are here to help, we are ready. They are going to work on that.

Q: Thank you for this interesting interview.